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ABSTRACT

Historical study of composition theory and teaching occupies a peculiar place in the discipline of composition instruction. It does not attempt new applications for theory, and pretends to no direct pedagogical applications at all. Unlike empirical research, it does not use experimental method or scientific rigor. However, the study of history, for various reasons, is one of the central continuing humanistic endeavours. And to find meaning in the story of composition teaching theory is to find meaning in the discipline itself. During the nineteenth century the college course in writing grew out of social and cultural forces demanding such instruction, and not out of a body of theoretical knowledge that could be developed and applied. Composition at the college level was created nearly out of whole cloth by the instructors charged with teaching it, and understanding the battles fought during its creation and some of the major figures involved can lead to a clearer picture of its uniqueness and of the unique problems of the discipline. (CRH)

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HISTORICAL INQUIRY IN COMPOSITION STUDIES

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Historical study of composition theory and teaching occupies a peculiar place in our discipline. It is unlike what Janice Lauer calls analogical-theoretical research, our most common sort, in that it does not attempt new applications for theory; indeed, it pretends to no direct pedagogical applications at all. It is unlike empirical research, that current savior/demon, in that it does not use the experimental method or pretend to any scientific rigor. Thus historical study misses out on what are probably the major constituents of scholarly discourse in composition studies; it seems something of an orphan. And yet for the past thirty years or more, a small but dedicated group of scholars in the field has been poring through dusty papers, disinterring yellowed journals, cracking the spines of crumbling old textbooks, to try to find-- what? Certainly it could be nothing practical, nothing useful. Or could it? In this essay I would like to discuss some of the questions raised by historical scholarship in composition studies, examine the uses of historical knowledge to the field, and finally, discuss the problems and practice of history for those who might be interested in attempting it themselves.

A year or two ago, a gentleman asked me--not intending any rudeness-- why I bothered with historical study of composition teaching and theory. "Isn't it all," he asked, "just navel-gazing?" I nattered out some response, but the charge implicit in his question disturbed me--because it seemed such a just charge. I had, after all, to admit that my long chases through the library in search of Alexander Bain and Charles Coppens had resulted in work that was

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devoid of interest outside a rather narrow field even of my professional peers. "Navel-gazing" seemed a cruel but accurate description; how could meditating on my own professional past make the connections to the world that give scholarship meaning? I was so disturbed by the charge that I began to think very seriously about the purpose of what I had been doing.

There are, of course, general defenses to be made of historical study. History is one of the primary literary genres, one of the first great types of discourse produced by Western culture. Historical narratization is arguably one of the basic cognitive tasks of the mind, one of the essential operations by which we make sense of the world.[1] The study of history is one of the most central continuing humanistic endeavors. And yet these abstract defenses of historical study, valid though they may be when used to defend the study of the great actions and movements that have produced the human story so far, sound a bit pretentious when applied to the study of one specialized area of educational endeavor, the teaching of effective written communication.

We are, I think, brought up against the inescapable fact that if we do not find concrete and useful meaning in the story of composition teaching and theory we will not find much real meaning in it at all. Abstract appeals to the value of historical knowledge for its own sake will in this case lead only to overspecialized and unread productions of the sort that increasingly plague our brethren in literary studies--the "more and more about less and less" syndrome that has threatened humanistic study with irrelevance in the minds of many non-academic people. Narrow overspecialization is no desideratum for any scholar--for any writer--wishing to look to the world beyond the confines of an academic specialty. Only the most purblind and creeping academician struggling to turn out some quantity of pages could completely dismiss the question of whether her work might do some good for the world.

So if we glean no knowledge which increases our humanity from the study of the past we are doomed to fatuity. But what can our field, generally obsessed by the problems of the moment or looking to the revelations of the future, learn from such study of days gone by? What can the stuffy classrooms and drafty studies in which our discipline arose tell us today?

I will argue that by studying the ways in which composition was formed and shaped both by choice and by necessity we learn who we are, come to understand more clearly the power we hold and the constraints that oppress us. Through a better understanding of how we as teachers and scholars came to exist, we can perhaps understand more clearly the complex web of forces that make up the fabric of our special discipline and work within those forces more successfully for effective practice. To quote Eliot, "we shall not cease from exploration/ and the end of all our exploring/ will be to arrive where we started/ and know the place for the first time."

Our discipline has a special need for such careful study, because it has and has always had a unique nature setting it apart from other college- level disciplines. Every other course of study currently taught in colleges had its beginnings as a body of knowledge, sometimes inchoate but always pre-existing, that was considered valuable enough to be formalized and taught. History, mathematics, literature, theology, and even the vocational disciplines--engineering, marketing, hotel management--fit into college curricula by developing and refining large bodies of knowledge that had been accumulating naturally throughout human history. Often, of course, the adoption of a discipline by college curricula accelerated the processes of development and discovery that had theretofore been carried on by amateurs, enthusiasts, or private societies. In no case, that I can think of, however, have colleges decreed that an area previously uninvestigated would henceforward be an important theatre of operations.

Except for composition. During the nineteenth century the college course in writing grew, as I have shown elsewhere, out of social and cultural forces demanding such instruction and not out of a body of theoretical knowledge that could be developed and applied. To some degree, of course, the fledgling discipline of composition used and adapted elements of the much older tradition of rhetoric that preceded it, but these rhetorical elements quickly became a decidedly minor part of traditional composition. Writing theory was also affected by the field of English grammar, which was itself in a developmental state at the time, but despite the grammatical/mechanical cast of much early writing instruction, composition courses were not grammar courses. No, the fact is that between 1840 and 1895 composition as a college-level course had to be created nearly out of whole cloth by the instructors charged with teaching it, and it is this fact that lies behind the uniqueness--and the unique problems--of our field.

All this happened for essentially cultural reasons. After the prescriptive-usage furor of the 1860's and the results of the Harvard entrance exams of the 1870's, American awareness of language and literacy was sharply stirred to wakefulness. Genuine problems of literacy, ignored for decades, became grist for the mill of Gilded Age ingenuity. If college fresnmen were writing at a very primitive level, then they must be taught to do better, and at institutions great and small the attempt was taken up. Was not writing, after all, one of the most ancient of arts; was it not an art familiar to most educated people? Certainly the secrets of understanding it theoretically and thus instructing in it scientifically could be unlocked. It was true, of course, that traditional rhetorical theory gave disappointingly little help with the actual writing --with sentence and paragraph construction-- and that traditional grammar contributed nothing at all to understanding how discourse

was organized. But this was, after all, the nineteenth century, and surely a dedicated attack on these questions of the nature of writing could answer them. Surely theory could be discovered that would help teachers deal with the appalling literacy crisis of the 1870's and 1880's.

Theories of writing seemed to be needed, and theories of writing were delivered. We got Henry Day's Laws of Discourse, David Hill's Scientific Laws of Form, Alexander Bain's Six Rules of Paragraphing, A.S. Hill's Principles of Clearness, Force, and Ease, John Genung's General Laws of Selection, Arrangement, and Proportion--the list could go much farther. Given an essentially open field, the teachers and textbook authors of the latter nineteenth century felt compelled to fill it up with ostensible theories about what general principles lay behind good writing. "Rhetoric cannot make laws for composition," wrote David J. Hill in his 1877 Science of Rhetoric, "but it can discover them." And the "discoveries" kept on coming. Between 1850 and 1920 the theoretical groundwork was laid for every important element in current-traditional composition theory--the four modes of discourse, the organic paragraph, Unity, Coherence and Emphasis, the patterns of exposition, the short "theme," the subject outline, the use of absolutist rules of conventional usage. None of these had existed in college teaching before 1820. All were artificial, invented to provide content for courses in "freshman English" that had been institutionally mandated to try to solve perceived problems in general literacy. It is this essentially invented nature of a large part of our traditional instructional repertoire that has made composition so unique a discipline and one that so repays historical study.

The artificial nature of much composition theory means that the composition historian cannot merely be a detective. She must be a

diagnostician and a pathologist as well. We who study the history of composition have found not merely the wealth of interesting detail and intriguing figures that historians of other disciplines find, but also the roots of appalling problems that remain unsolved and largely unrecognized into our own day. Historians of science and of other disciplines can point to the gradual development and refinement of the bodies of knowledge they purvey, to a gradual improvement of their methods and findings. Historians of composition, however, can point to little improvement until fairly recently, because not only was the discipline they are investigating artificially created, but it has also suffered through nearly a century as what can only be called an educational slum. Even as the last bricks were being put in place on the edifice of composition theory, the entire socioculture of language and literary study in America was changing radically. The whole endeavor of composition teaching--built none too soundly to begin with--very quickly moved to the "wrong side of the tracks" as the two-tier literature/composition structure of modern English departments was established around the turn of the century.

I need not rehearse in any detail the results of that split. Briefly, the establishment of literary studies as the "primary" duty of English departments and resultant demotion of composition theory and instruction to "service" status and intellectual disparagement has affected the socioculture of the field of composition in a singular fashion. Just as the genesis of our theory was unique in being ab ovo, so the development of our field was unique in the general overwork, oppression, and lack of respect that kept composition studies a pathetic intellectual backwater through most of this century. No other college discipline can look back to a history so blighted. During a part of this time, composition studies can hardly even be called a discipline;

it was less a field of intellectual interest than a required course and those unfortunates dragooned into teaching it. Between 1910 and 1950 there were very few English scholars who would openly have admitted that their primary area of scholarly study was composition. Staffed by a constantly rotated series of graduate-student apprentices and low-level faculty members, the composition course was a dreaded bore and bugbear for both teachers and students--hardly the stuff of which a vital scholarly discipline is made.

The point I am trying to make is that our discipline is unique and uniquely troubled. Our story is not conveniently filed away in the past; our history cannot be relegated to a few articles for specialists--because we continue to inhabit a professional world directly shaped by it on all levels. As William Faulkner said, "The past isn't dead. It isn't even past." All disciplines are, of course, intellectually indebted to the discoveries of their earlier practitioners, but we in composition studies are involved with our past in a cultural way as well. Our history is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken. We are today still fighting the battles for respect begun by Fred Newton Scott in the 1890's; we are still struggling against the mechanism in teaching decried by Porter Perrin in 1930; we still suffer from the overwork that led the Hopkins Committee in 1912 to report that, "At the present time English teachers must choose between overwork and bad work; between spoiling their material or killing themselves." Our history is not dead. It's not even past.

A careful examination of our past is a useful antidote to modern smugness, for the historian of composition quickly learns the lessons of humility and sympathy. Those who know only a little history often sneer at these eighteenth and nineteenth century schoolmasters and professors, authors and promulgators of what we now think as some of the most specious and

destructive educational theory ever imagined. Exposed to them more closely, however, a new empathy for the struggles of our progenitors creeps in. Behind the funny type in their books and the inflated oratorical cadence of their prose, here are men and women like us, neither brilliant nor stupid, striving as we do to understand and solve the very same problems we still face. They did not succeed; some of their attempts were wrongheaded and destructive; and the desert is littered with the wreckage of their theories and techniques. But even so, our professional ancestors have given us a great gift. They lacked one important body of information that we have: the lesson of their examples. Starting from all but zero, our progenitors during the past century made many false starts, and worse, constructed and perpetuated many monstrous errors. But we no longer must start from zero. We stand on their shoulders, and by showing us the wrong paths they have given us invaluable clues as to how we might try to find the right ones.

Composition teachers need to know the story of their discipline. All too much of the composition "scholarship" still sent to journals today, as Gary Tate once remarked, consists of fruitless reiteration, endless reinvention of the wheel. Each new generation of composition teachers since 1900 has discovered certain standard facts about teaching writing by teaching it, and these discoveries were for years routinely reported to journals as new news. It is not surprising that this should be so; the degraded nature of the discipline militated both against long-term commitments to composition scholarship and against the creation of the bibliographical tools that would make literature surveys possible. Thus, until recently, composition as a discipline existed in a sort of benighted eternal present, revolving between a highly suspect tradition that was inadequately tested because few scholars saw their life's work in composition, and a series of teaching techniques and

"innovations" that were painfully discovered anew by every new generation of working teachers.

In order to know our present, I am arguing, we must know our past. We can only grapple with the questions of today if we are certain that the questions of yesterday have been answered. As Santayana put it so tellingly in The Life of Reason, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." And thus I make my defense of historical study in composition, not as the primary work we do--that needs always to be subject-oriented and not profession-oriented--but as an important area of field knowledge that every scholar should be aware of. Only the knowledge of where we came from gives meaning to the knowledge of where we are going.

Given this essentially philosophical defensio of historical study in compostion, I want now to examine some of the basic information that a historian of composition must have and to outline the essential tools she will be using. First of all, it seems inescapable that a historian of composition must first be a rhetorical scholar and have a solid, if not a specialist's, grasp of rhetorical history. Although I have argued that composition history grows from rhetorical history only in convoluted fashion, grow from it it does, and the composition historian must be able to draw these crucial connections. From Gorgias through Whately, the historian must know her rhetoric cold, because it is certain that the polymath rhetoricians of the nineteenth century did. Covering the periods up until 1830 or so, of course, there is ample rhetorical scholarship--most of it emanating from Speech departments-- to assist the historian, but after 1830 the history of composition is the history of rhetoric, at least until the modern period. It is here where traditional rhetorical history breaks down and the composition scholar must blaze her own trails.

And what tools do we have with which to do that? There are, of course, all of the bibliographical weapons of the literary historian, and solid training in literary history stands one in good stead. Such general sources as the DNB, the DAB, the NUC, the Catalog of the British Library, early encyclopedias and serials, will all be used. At just the point where literary bibliography blossoms with wonderful resources, however--most notably the splendid MLA Bibliographies--the composition scholar finds herself relatively unaided. There is no master historical bibliography. Up until recently, there was hardly any secondary or bibliographical literature to which the historical scholar could turn. Most of us relied on the bibliographies and indices at the back of Albert Kitzhaber's pioneering 1953 dissertation Rhetoric in American Colleges 1850-1900 when we first began writing. I, for one, quite literally cruised the stacks of the Middleton Library at LSU taking down and noting every book in the composition sections. Without bibliographical references, Kitzhaber, the stacks, and the NUC were all that most of us had.

This situation, happily, is changing. Composition does not yet have an equivalent to the MLA Bibliography, but better tools have quickly appeared in the last three years and more are being planned.[2] Especially useful have been the two bibliographical books edited by Winifred Horner, which lead the reader to most of the good historical scholarship that has been done, both in Speech and in English.[3] Our secondary resources are growing.

But of course there is finally no substitute for going to the original sources in order to write history, and here we encounter some methodological questions. To what sources can or should we go? Historical scholarship in composition has tended to rely a great deal on printed materials--primarily textbooks, but on journals as well--in order to write histories of theory and

of teaching. Such reliance on printed sources has been criticized by Susan Miller, who complains that the resulting histories are histories of textbook publishing and not of classroom practice.[4] Miller implicitly calls for composition history based on the model of the annales school in France, which innovated the historiographic method of exhaustive analysis of thousands and thousands of memos, journals, public records of all sorts, in order to draw generalizations that accurately reflect the activities of life and people of the period.[5] The alternate traditional school of Anglo-American historiography, what we might reductively call "kings and battles" history, tends to rely more on published sources than does the annales school, and it tends to concentrate on great events and on identifiable figures. This traditional historical model is the one in which most of us in composition--myself included--have worked.

I do not wish to minimize the force of Miller's critique or to criticize the admirable (and sometimes awe-inspiring) work of annales-school historians. It is true that composition historians do rely heavily on printed sources, and it is true that there are many important elements in composition teaching we can never guess at when working only from them. In defense of our efforts, however, I must remind the reader that the sort of complete history --coverage of classroom teaching techniques, student attitudes and abilities, teacher training and interests--that annales-style coverage would mean can only be effectively done after the major currents of the age--important figures and theories--have been mapped out. It is easy to forget exactly how incognita is the terra we're working with here. Before Kitzhaber, only a very few scholars of composition knew anything about when their discipline had begun, and even in the thirty years since Kitzhaber we have made only slow progress toward covering even the major figures.[6] For the time being, I would argue, we need

"kings and battles" history, if only to establish the "public" framework from which more in-depth studies can be hung.

There is also the very real problem of source material, which often makes scholarship based on printed sources difficult and which would, I am afraid, make serious annales-school studies nearly impossible. It is a sad reality that almost no discipline has generated so much material with such a short half-life as has composition. One extremely valuable resource, for instance, a resource that could tell us a tremendous amount about the progress of our discipline, has not survived in any numbers at all: student essays from the nineteenth century and even most of the twentieth. Except for a collection of late nineteenth century papers collected at Harvard in 1897 to illustrate the "illiteracy of American boys," we have almost no evidence of what early student themes looked like. (The Harvard collection, while instructive, is not necessarily representative of all student writing.) Neither have many of the adjunct materials of early writing courses--syllabi, correction sheets, assignments, notes--come down to us. We are forced to rely on teachers' descriptions of their techniques and rationalizations, usually retrospective, of their activities. Because so many of the source materials in composition have proven ephemeral--after all, how long do you keep student essays or old course notes?--scholarship in composition history has been shaped by what we do have--journal articles and textbooks.

Journal articles are, of course, tremendously useful, but rather late in arriving; articles helpful in understanding the development of writing instruction do not appear before the latter part of the 1880's, and there were no journals specifically concerned with composition questions before 1911. A number of language and philological journals--most notably PMLA and AJP--were started during the eighties, but not until the early education journals

Education, Educational Review, and School Review were published did composition pedagogy get any real treatment. Through the nineteenth century these were the periodicals in which the major figures published. Not until 1911 do we see English Journal, the first English journal to deal with pedagogical questions as well as literary ones.[7] After that, the venues for articles on college writing were fairly straightforward: English Journal, then in 1928, the "College Edition" of EJ, in 1939, College English, and in 1949, College Composition and Communication. That brings us essentially into the modern era.

Library holdings in Educational Review, School Review, EJ, CE, and CCC are crucial to careful historical scholarship in composition. That gives us nearly a century of articles on composition in journals. This is not the place to describe in detail the sorts of essays the historian reads in these yellowed and fragile volumes. We do find, of course, endless reinvention of the wheel. There are also during the nineteenth century the ubiquitous wranglings over correctness and usage and technique, over illiteracy and the end of standards, the multitudinous proud descriptions of programs. In the twentieth century the tone changes, especially in the NCTE journals, and as early as the 'teens we see a new awareness as the work of educational theorists --most notably John Dewey--became known. I have heard several people not used to reading old journals exclaim over the progressiveness and modern thought to be found in the EJ of the twenties and thirties--a progressiveness a bit surprising to those who had tacitly assumed that composition created its modern ideas out of whole cloth in the early sixties. Composition journals since 1911 have always had a high percentage of good sense and useful ideas in them. What they did not have, until recently, was a large readership with the power to change essential conditions of

teacher training and preparation. Thus the good ideas and cogent critiques often went unacted upon, little noticed by the mainstream traditions of the discipline.

This brings us to textbooks, which were and still are the essential conservators of those traditions and are thus our central historical sources. It is in textbooks, which were used and relied upon by the tens of thousands of actual teachers, and not in journals, which were read by a much smaller number (in 1930 the EJ counted about 1000 subscribers, including libraries), that we find the true organs of tradition. As James McCrimmon noted of handbooks in 1941, textbooks have traditionally been the teachers' teachers in composition. Until very recently, a new teacher of writing was initiated by having a textbook placed in her hands and being told to "do your best," and thus she took whatever the textbook contained as the essential subject matter of the writing course. Generally overworked and without ready professional support for careful study of rhetorical or even pedagogical theory, writing teachers took instead for their guiding lights the semi-accidental agglomeration of common sense, unproven theory, and pure assertion that writing texts have generally purveyed. The result, as we all know, was a preparatory tradition that was rooted in static rather than dynamic and flexible knowledge. Composition textbook theory changed--albeit slowly-- but it changed in response to marketplace conditions and not in response to new discoveries by theorists or researchers.[8] Thus "textbook composition" came to be whatever sold the best to undertrained and overworked teachers and not the proven theory that is found in the textbooks of other disciplines.

It is precisely because of this lamentable condition that textbooks are so important to the historian. Susan Miller is certainly right to argue that textbooks do not reflect the entirety of composition teaching in America, but

I believe that what they do reflect is primary if we view the teaching of writing as part of the history of ideas. Textbooks provide the best reflection we have of what was actually taught as the subject matter of composition, because to do so was always their generic purpose.[9] Because textbooks go all the way back to and in some ways define the beginning of composition in America, and because they provide our best look at what it was that writing teachers thought they were supposed to teach, they are among the historian's primary tools. There are, unfortunately, few libraries with genuinely good collections of old textbooks. Harvard's is almost certainly the best, and the older state universities tend to have impressive collections as well. Many libraries have excluded textbooks from their stack collections, thus destroying all hope of finding resources for composition history. Others may have decent holdings of nineteenth-century texts and nothing from the equally important first six decades of the twentieth century. That scholar is fortunate whose library holds all of Henry Day's books from the 1850's and 1860's as well as all of Henry Seidel Canby's from the 1920's and 1930's. Holdings in both areas are crucial to an understanding of how we came to be who we are.

There are also a plentitude of professional books that are invaluable to the researcher. Through the 1890's and then in the new century, the field of composition--which was always considered a social problem--spun off hundreds of books describing, critiquing, bragging, despairing of, promoting the teaching of writing. After the founding of the NCTE in 1911 many books of this sort came to be published under that organization's auspices. These professional books, especially those published after 1920 or so, are usually readily found in college libraries. They can be very helpful to the historian, but they are more akin to journals than to textbooks in their

idealism and self-promotional elements. Like the historian of early oral cultures, who must constantly keep in mind the fact that all we have of such cultures is filtered through the perceptions of literate minds, the historian of composition must always remember that the intellectual, critical, self-conscious questing found in English Journal essays and NCTE curriculum guides represents only one level of composition pedagogy--a level not necessarily shared by the majority of teachers.

These, then, are the central tools of the historian. To them, she applies the three stages of traditional historical analysis. The first is external ctiticism, which establishes what sources are available for a particular historical project and establishes whether available sources are appropriate to the task or adequate to handle it well. For a recent project on handbooks, for instance, it was important that I be aware of all the important composition handbooks prior to 1940 or so. In order to do this I had to search all the library stacks under three different LC and Dewey classes, then supplement the resulting list of handbooks by cross-checking all author's names in the NUC, by doing call-number searches on the OCLC computer system, by searching the advertisements, "new books" lists, and book review pages of educational and NCTE journals going back to 1880. I then had to use the Inter-Library Loan system to get my hands on books that I needed to see. (There is no substitute for having a book in your hands.) Only after I had finished this process could move on to the historian's next step: internal criticism.

Internal criticism examines the sources with the intent of making sure that they're understood correctly. The historian must check the language and usage of sources to prevent misreading, eliminate corruptions or glosses, try to enter into the worlds and minds of the writers of her sources. For the

handbook project, for instance, I had to make certain that I understood what the word "correctness" meant in 1870 and what it meant--something quite different--in 1915. I had to decide which of the books I had uncovered were genuine handbooks and which were something else--grammar books, or usage debates, or some other sort of text. I had to study the development of the term "grammar." I had to try to validate Albert Kitzhaber's contention that Edmund Wooley's Handbook of 1907 was the first composition handbook, and I had to attempt to understand whether all of A.S. Hill's talk about the "illiteracy" of American boys in 1890 would seem valid to us today. I had, in short, to study all my sources very carefully in order to understand them correctly. When I felt satisfied that I had done all I could reasonably hope to do (you can never can do all you should do), I was ready for the final step: synthesis of materials.

Synthesis of materials is the process by which the historian "makes sense" of the scattered and disparate sources she has located and studied. Ideas of cause and effect, inductively arrived-at generalizations, patterns of influence, the varied systems of connection by which we arrive at conclusions about what reality is, all are brought into play. Often such ideas whirl in suspension in the historian's mind, or as scattered notes, until the first draft of the project takes shape. The final product of this stage, for me at least, is a rough manuscript draft of the final essay-- ready to be cut or added to, but possessing the key elements of my understanding of the sources. During this stage of the handbook project I was forced to decide on a number of crucial issues my sources had raised. What was the first handbook? How did the gross overwork of the teachers of the 1890's contribute to the development of handbooks? Why did handbooks become so physically large in the 1940's? What was the secret of the handbook's power during this

century? Finally, of course, all of these questions had to be answered by decisions on my part, but in order to make defensible decisions I was forced to draw on my own synthesis of readings in all my sources. For me, at least, this is the most demanding stage of the process.

This brings up the final question I want to address, the question of historical objectivity and the neutrality of historians. As anyone who is familiar with my historical writing knows, I do not pretend to a neutral stance in my treatment of composition history. This is not the place for a discussion of the philosophical question of historical objectivity; I will only say that I believe with Wilhelm Dilthey that history cannot pretend to any quasi-scientific system and that historical information is meaningful and intelligible only in the sense that historians make it so. There is an inescapable component of value judgment in any historical interpretation, and in my work--in most composition history that I've seen since Kitzhaber-- that component is out in the open. To put it bluntly, composition historians have set themselves a propagandistic agenda as well as an informative agenda. We see ourselves as reformers as well as scholars; thus, when Don Stewart attacks A. S. Hill's formalism or I praise Porter Perrin's progressive rejection of drill-work we are making claims about composition today as well as about composition in 1885 or in 1930.

This is, I believe, as it should be. The lessons of history have not yet been much applied in our field, and composition is not yet so stable, settled, or successful that it can pretend to scholarly neutrality. There are still large questions to be answered about our scope and ends and purpose, and our historical studies are brought to life by the service they can give in answering such questions. This is not to say that we should ignore or scant standards of objectivity in particular projects. Slanted evidence, misused

sources, shaky generalizations, all will continue to be anathema to the serious historian of composition. But moral and practical evaluations drawn from our disciplinary history are inescapable, at least in our present phase of development.

And I, for one, do not regret that. I would much rather sin against some ideal standard of historical neutrality and objectivity than scribble out my life in a sunless and unemotional world of pure factualism. For me, composition history is alive. It forces the scholar to take sides. I have struggled to read two hundred daily themes with the the brilliant and ascerbic Barrett Wendell, have sat at the desk of gentle John Genung and formulated paragraph theory. I have stood aghast while hacks like Morris Fulton and R. W. Pence controlled my discipline, and have cheered on Sterling Leonard and Porter Perrin as they fought back with intelligence and common sense. I have followed the decline of rhetoric and its rebirth, seen great plans fail and little books make tycoons out of surprised pencil-pushers. And it is not over, and never will be over. Those same questions faced by Fred Scott and C.S. Baldwin still face us. Our professional forebears did not leave us the answers to those questions. The gift they give us is their story, and seeing finally that it is our story too is what makes composition history worthwhile.

NOTES

1 For a provocative discussion of how narratization of events is an important component of consciousness itself, see Julian Jaynes, The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 1-37.

2 A very useful recent article on bibliographical resources in composition history is Patrick Scott and Bruce Castner, "Reference Sources for Composition Research: A Practical Survey," College English 45 (Dec. 1983), 756-768.

3 Winifred Bryan Horner, ed., Historical Rhetoric: An Annotated Bibliography of Selected Sources in English (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980), and Winifred Bryan Horner, ed., The Present State of Scholarship in Historical and Contemporary Rhetoric (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983).

4 Miller's discussion is found in "Is There A Text In This Class?" Freshman English News 11 (1982), 22-23.

5 See, most obviously, the works of Fernand Braudel and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie for examples of annales-style coverage.

6 We do not yet have scholarly editions of the major rhetorical works of the later nineteenth century, although that situation will begin to change when Southern Illinois University Press publishes Andrea Lunsford's edition of Alexander Bain in 1985.

7 It must be noted here that not until the 1960's was there talk of "composition theory" or any idea that writing or discourse might have identifiable systems that needed no reference to pedagogy.

8 For one example of exactly how this takes place, see Robert J. Connors, "Current-Traditional Rhetoric: Thirty Years of Writing With A Purpose," Rhetoric Society Quarterly XI (1981), 208-221.

9 We sometimes forget that "textbooks" per se are a relatively recent educational development. There were, of course, always specialized books primarily used in education-lectures, handbooks, vademecums--but the textbooks, a book specifically designed to standardize and formalize classroom teaching, did not appear until the mid-nineteenth century. The first obvious texts in America did not appear until after the great Protestant college-building boom of the 1830's and 1840's, which seeded the southern and midwestern states with small denominational colleges and placed an acute strain upon traditional methods of producing college teachers.

The older college system of the East Coast could simply not produce enough competent scholars and teachers to staff the rhetoric courses or these new schools. The well-meaning but untrained ushers who were often hired to do the teaching could not draw from deep scholarly backgrounds in their teaching; they needed support systems, and thus were born, around 1850, composition textbooks such as those of Henry Day, George Quackenbos, Richard Green Parker, David J. Hill, and, eventually, Alexander Bain. These books were designed to do a job different from books of lectures like Blair's or treatises like Whately's, the successful teaching of which took pedagogical and theoretical background. The new texts assumed no background. What they provided was essentially a formalization of the classroom activities of a competent teacher that could be adapted by a less competent teacher. The changeover from lecture-based instruction to textbook-based instruction is fascinatingly illustrated by the nineteenth-century editions of Hugh Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles- Lettres. In the 1840's, editions of Blair began to appear in which each lecture was followed by series of simplistic questions, authored by "Abraham Mills, Teacher of Rhetoric," which essentially asked the student-reader to spit back Blair's passages almost verbatim. These Mills

editions were exceedingly popular, testifying to the relief that teachers must have felt in giving their classes over into the hands of a textbook-master--uninspired though he may have been. Textbooks in composition thus have their roots in a crisis of competency as old as the college teaching of writing itself. The situation did not change much between 1860 and 1940; in fact, after the Morrill Act of 1862 and the consequent growth of land-grant colleges, the problem of competent teachers of writing grew even worse. The growth of two-tier departments of English underlined the low status of composition teaching, all but guaranteeing that writing courses would continue to be staffed by temporary or peripheral persons. Thus textbooks became the central artifacts and crutches of the field.